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ABSTRACT

The concept of andragogy, which was conceived by Malcolm S. Knowles, forms the underlying principles for adult basic education (ABE) preservice and inservice training programs. Knowles identified the following five focal points that he felt should be considered by adult educators: self-concept, experience, readiness, time perspective, and orientation to learning. In light of these focal points, preservice training programs for ABE instructors should cover (1) the nature of ABE, (2) general characteristics of ABE students, (3) ABE program objectives, and (4) appropriate pedagogical techniques for ABE (programmed instruction, individualized instruction, lecture, language experience, contract learning, group discussions, group tutoring, and the Laubach method). When designing inservice training for ABE instructors, planners should remember that effective ABE programs must respond to current and changing needs, establish ties with other educational institutions, monitor teacher effectiveness, and develop credibility within the community. (MN)

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ANDRAGOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESERVICE - INSERVICE TRAINING

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ANDRAGOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESERVICE - INSERVICE TRAINING

The concept of andragogy, conceived by Malcolm S. Knowles (1970), forms the underlying principles for the adult basic education (ABE) preservice - inservice teacher training programs. Knowles' concept of andragogy suggests that the teaching process for the adult learner have as its foundation a consideration of the developmental stages of adult life which includes past experiences, present responsibilities, and current and future needs. The instructional methods employed must of necessity differ from the ones used in elementary and secondary schools although the desired results may be the same. Given the above considerations, the adult basic education teacher becomes a facilitator of learning who possesses knowledge of the learning process, of the materials, of the subject matters, and of the adult students' goals, dreams, aspirations, needs and motivations (Ulmer & Dinnan, 1981). Thus, the preservice - inservice training for the instructional staff must be mindful of the characteristics unique to adult learners and reflect such both in the methodology and materials used to facilitate their learning process.

Knowles (1970) identified five focal points concerning adults which he felt should be considered by teachers of adult education students.

1. Self-concept. The focus is on adult learners who know what they want from the educational experience but may or may not be able to express such desires in educational terms.

Since these persons are adults and have functioned as self-directed persons in making decisions, they deserve an opportunity to participate in planning their own educational experiences. For the adult learner to function effectively, he or she must receive respect as a person from a supportive classroom environment and from the adult basic education staff.

2. Experience. Every adult learner has a lifetime of experiences. Sharing their experiences creates a rich learning resource for other class members. The mechanism for student-teacher involvement in planning is in place and should be used.

3. Readiness. Readiness on the part of the adult learner is indicated by their enrollment in class. Usually the need is immediate.

4. Time perspective. The adult learner tends to think in terms of the time he or she may have left. Out of necessity, the adult learner is more interested in immediacy of application than in general learning for delayed returns. Education, most probably, will be a part-time endeavor in a busy life that requires their learning to be purposeful.

5. Orientation to learning. Most adult learners are problem-centered and want to be assured that the classes they take will help solve life-centered problems. This again indicates the importance of involving both the teacher and the adult learner in program planning.

PRESERVICE TRAINING FOR ABE INSTRUCTORS

Preservice training can serve as an orientation program designed to provide unity, competence and confidence through the dissemination of information to the new ABE staff member. As a group, ABE instructors are unique, forming their new group from an existing pool of previously trained educators. The range of professionally prepared instructors often includes elementary, secondary and post-secondary teachers. Because of this diverse cadre of professionals, preservice training should be conducted to focus on understanding the adult learner and the nature and scope of the job. Therefore, the following topics would be suitable as agenda items for preservice training.

1. The Nature of the Adult Basic Education Program. Preservice training should help acquaint new ABE instructors with the nature and background of the ABE program. Such background information would include information on the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which placed the responsibility for eliminating adult illiteracy on public education. Another federal enactment, the Adult Education Act of 1966, established the guidelines for adult education programs which would provide education for adults whose inability to speak, read or write the English language constituted a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurante with their real ability. These programs were also designed to help

eliminate such inability, raise the level of education of such individuals with a view of making them less likely to become dependent on others, improve their ability to benefit from occupational training, and otherwise increase their opportunity for more productive and profitable employment. This would make them better able to meet their adult responsibilities.

The segment of the adult population that could benefit from this kind of educational assistance would include high school drop-outs, underemployed, unemployed, homemakers, senior citizens, speakers of other languages, inmates and/or developmentally disabled persons.

2. General Characteristics of ABE Students. Preservice training should describe for the new and review for the existing instructional staff the general characteristics of ABE students. Today's ABE student is one of approximately 60 million adults between the ages of 18 and 80, and considered to be functionally illiterate. Of this total, approximately 23 to 25 million adults, or 1 in 5 lack the reading and writing abilities needed to handle the minimal demands of daily living. Another 30 million adults are reported only marginally capable, while an estimated one million more young adults will drop out of school yearly (Wellborn, 1982). As a group, ABE students might demonstrate the following characteristics:

- an orientation toward the present rather than toward the future.

- signs of being introverted.
- feelings of inferiority, intimidation and low self-esteem.
- perceptiveness in non-verbal forms of communications.
- resourceful methods of coping with academic inadequacies.
- establishing alternative methods of life survival techniques (North Carolina Department of Community Colleges, 1981).

3. Adult Basic Education Program Objectives. Preservice training sessions are an appropriate time to present and review the general objectives of the ABE program. When the staff is familiar with the program objectives the instructional phase of the program has specific direction and the instructional staff can then concentrate on providing quality instruction through a variety of instructional techniques. Most ABE programs will develop program objectives that are appropriate to a specific local or expressed need in addition to the following general program objectives such as:

- to provide academic literacy skills to adults
- to provide coping or life skills to adults
- to provide secondary instruction to adults
- to provide secondary credentialing to adults
- to provide instruction in English (ESL) to nonfluent speakers of English.

4. Pedagogical Techniques for Adult Basic Education Students. During a preservice training session a presentation of several instructional techniques that have been highly successful with the ABE population might be very beneficial. It should be stressed that the success of any method greatly depends on the skill of the instructor and the receptibility of the students. Those techniques that have been successful with the ABE student include the following:

Programmed Instruction - The students work alone step-by-step through a workbook or computer program with the instructor serving as a resource, a facilitator or an evaluator.

Individualized Instruction - The teacher designs the instructional program and chooses the materials for each student. The method of instruction may include slides, audio or video cassette tapes, records and films.

Lecture - The teacher orally presents the subject material to the entire group of students. Supplemental materials at appropriate reading levels are then distributed.

Language Experience - Students talk about a specific topic while the instructor writes down what is said. Either the students or the teacher may read back the completed piece. Specific reading lessons can then be generated through this method.

Contract Learning - The teacher develops a specific contract with a student concerning class progress. This method usually includes specific materials and time allotments.

Group Discussions - Group discussions may be started by a student or teacher concerning a particular subject presented in print, on the radio, or via television. A follow-up to the discussion portion of the instructional lesson can include a skills lesson developed around the topic of interest.

Peer Tutoring - After students become familiar and comfortable with each other, they may wish to work together to help each other master or reinforce a particular skill.

Laubach Method - A one-to-one instructional program in which a sound pattern method is used and instant reinforcement is provided. Some writing instructions are presented as a part of the lesson. The method requires a certified Laubach trainer.

INSERVICE TRAINING FOR ABE INSTRUCTORS

Inservice training for the ABE instructional staff can be quite extensive and serve many intended purposes including bridging the gap between prior professional training and the acquisition of specific skills or knowledge needed to adequately serve the adult student population. In line with these purposes the following points might be considered for program planning.

1. Respond to current and changing needs. It is rare to find a professional staff that will not respond to inservice training if the training is responsive to their needs and interests. The key is really a common sense approach (Williamson and Elfman, 1982). First, assess the staff to determine their needs and interests. Secondly, identify and rank short-range (current) needs and long-range (changing or future) needs. Next, plan the process of inservice training identifying specific goals. Conduct the inservice training session, and evaluate in terms of the stated goals and objectives.

2. Establish ties with other educational institutions. Local community colleges, colleges and universities can be an excellent resource agent once program or staff needs have been established. Providing appropriate continuing education courses is only one of the many functions or services they can provide. They may also assist in on-site inservice training, serve as an instructional material resource provider and/or assist in external program evaluation.

3. Monitor teacher effectiveness. Inservice training programs can be practical, systematic, and an effective way to examine levels of teacher effectiveness by ABE instructors, program directors and other administrative personnel. First, most aspects of the instructional program can be dealt with

during inservice training sessions. Such program topics might range from diagnostic techniques (formal and informal assessment) to prescriptive strategies including individual contracts and competencies. Secondly, exposure to new instructional strategies and materials can be compared with current methods and materials to determine which would be most appropriate for use.

4. Develop credibility within the community. Inservice training sessions can be an excellent time to insure continued growth and development of the ABE program, and recognize that such a program depends, to a degree, on how well community groups and agencies view and support the program. Efforts by program personnel to acknowledge community groups and agencies, and share with them some facets of program planning and design, will heighten their spirit of participation and strengthen their support. A wealth of practical information from state and local government offices, banking institutions, schools, churches, charitable organizations, health related agencies and social service agencies can be obtained for the asking. It is, however, the responsibility of the instructor to incorporate such information into the program.

Preservice and inservice training for ABE instructors should result in two major outcomes. First, ABE instructors should begin to understand and feel more in tune with the expectations of their students, colleagues and program

administrators. Understanding the ABE student's priorities, needs and aspirations requires an understanding of the person as he or she moves through the developmental stages of adult life.

Secondly, ABE instructors should feel more comfortable functioning as the facilitators of learning who possess knowledge of all facets of the program, and who can operate within such a scope effectively. Through total staff planning, participation, and evaluation both preservice and inservice training becomes the foundation for productive learning experiences for ABE students.

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